

**PRESIDENTIAL POLICY MEMORANDUM NO. 224**

**TO:** All Faculty  
**FROM:** Charles W. Steger  
**DATE:** August 30, 2003  
**SUBJECT:** Faculty Commitment to the University

Approved by the Commission on Faculty Affairs: January 24, 2003  
Approved by University Council: March 17, 2003  
Recommended by the President: March 17, 2003  
Approved by the Board of Visitors: June 2, 2003  
Effective Date: Upon Approval

The University Council, on recommendation of the Commission on Faculty Affairs, approved a resolution concerning faculty commitment to the university. Following is the text of the resolution as adopted by University Council and the Board of Visitors.

WHEREAS, the university encourages active participation by faculty members in outside activities that are integral to and/or enhance their professional skills and standing, or which constitute substantive outreach and public service activities; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech encourages entrepreneurial activities by faculty, recognizing that such activities are critical to promoting economic development and meeting society's needs, provided that participation in those activities are in compliance with federal and state laws and policies and the Virginia Tech Conflict of Interest Policy; and

WHEREAS, a statement concerning faculty commitment to the university is needed to address the tension between increasing opportunities and demands for involvement in external activities and the faculty member's primary professional responsibility to the university; and

WHEREAS, the proposed statement on commitment reaffirms that a faculty member's primary commitment of time and intellectual energies shall be directed toward the education, research, service and outreach missions of the university, and states how external activities can be reported and monitored; and

WHEREAS, the proposed statement is a helpful complement to the previously approved policy on conflicts of interest (policy 13010);

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the section 2.16.3 of the Faculty Handbook be amended to incorporate the statement below on faculty commitment.

## **FACULTY COMMITMENT TO THE UNIVERSITY**

### **1.0 Purpose**

Upon accepting an academic appointment, Virginia Tech faculty members owe their primary professional responsibility to the university. Their primary commitment of time and intellectual energies shall be directed toward the education, research, service and outreach missions of the university. Faculty members have traditionally been allowed wide latitude in defining their professional agendas and their degree of involvement in external activities when those activities advance the mission or prestige of the university. However, excessive participation in activities external to the university can compromise the performance of the primary responsibilities of the faculty member. This policy is intended to guide involvement in external activities.

### **2.0 Statement of Principles**

The university encourages active participation by faculty members in external activities that are integral to and/or enhance their professional skills and standing, or which constitute substantive outreach and public service activities.

Such activities are usually expected of faculty members to promote academic development, and to enrich their contributions to the institution, to their profession, to the state, and to the national and world societies we serve. Additionally, Virginia Tech encourages entrepreneurial activities by faculty, recognizing that such activities are critical to promoting economic development and meeting society's needs, provided that participation in those activities are in compliance with federal and state laws and policies, the Virginia Tech Conflict of Interest Policy and these guidelines.

Faculty members should make the fulfillment of their responsibilities to the university the focal point of their academic activities. They are expected to arrange their external activities so that they do not impede or compromise their university duties and responsibilities. Responsibility for ensuring commitment to the university and for reporting activities that might be perceived as compromising that commitment rests with each faculty member in consultation with his/her unit administrator (typically the department head or chair, or center

director) and dean. The primary judgment as to whether a faculty member is meeting his/her professional responsibilities to the unit and the university rests within the faculty member's unit. The counsel of the unit administrator and colleagues, or dean, should provide valuable perspectives on faculty commitment.

### **3.0 Procedures to Monitor and Approve Involvement in External Activities**

The university recognizes that the balance of external activities varies among individuals, from discipline to discipline, and from one type of proposed activity to another. It will be affected by unit goals and changing needs for teaching, research, creative/artistic activities, extension, service, and outreach. Primary duties and responsibilities may vary from year to year for individual faculty members, and they are affected by undergraduate and graduate enrollment demands, faculty staffing levels, and changes in the nature and scope of outreach, teaching, and research within the unit. Therefore, the assessment of academic commitment is best performed at the unit level.

Faculty members have a responsibility to communicate to their unit administrator or dean any activities that might lead to a conflict of interest or conflict of commitment. External activities that have the potential to be conflicts of interest as defined in policy 13010 and also in the Faculty Handbook must be reported on the appropriate forms available on the Provost's web page ([www.provost.vt.edu](http://www.provost.vt.edu), select Faculty Handbooks and Policies) and approved in advance. The background document at the same web location gives examples of activities that must be reported in advance.

Reporting on external activities that are not inherently a conflict of interest may be done in several ways. For example, a statement of plans and goals in the Faculty Activities Report (FAR) or a Faculty Annual Plan (FAP) outline prospective plans for the upcoming academic or calendar year. These can serve as appropriate tools for consultation between faculty members and their unit administrator concerning involvement in external activities and should lead to recommendations regarding continuance or restriction of some external activities.

A statement of plans and goals in the FAR or a FAP should not be viewed as a static document; rather they should be considered as vital resources for updating and tracking both internal and external activities throughout the academic year. When unplanned requests for participation in external activities are recognized as impacting on university duties and responsibilities, they must be reported by the faculty member to the unit administrator, who will assess the activities in light of the current scope of activities, duties, and responsibilities of the faculty member.

Faculty members also may choose to write a letter of intent to their unit administrator, to complete and submit the Conflicts of Interest/Commitment Form 13010A, or to provide other documentation or correspondence with regard to participation in external activities.

It is the responsibility of the unit administrator to review and acknowledge communications regarding external commitments. The unit administrator should signify support for the planned activities, or should work with the faculty member to establish an appropriate level of commitment. At the end of the year, the Faculty Activity Report documents the faculty member's accomplishments related to their primary university duties and responsibilities as well their participation in or performance of external activities. It provides an opportunity for the unit administrator and dean to assess whether the faculty member's performance of primary duties has been compromised by excessive participation in external activities.

If a faculty member is committed to engaging in an external activity that compromises his/her ability to meet university responsibilities, a leave of absence may be appropriate or necessary. Approval of a leave request will depend on the needs of the college and unit and protection of university interests.

When a unit administrator, or dean, observes that a faculty member appears not to be fulfilling his/her primary responsibilities to the university, the faculty member will be immediately advised to ensure that these responsibilities are adequately met. Conflicts may be referred to the appeal process outlined in policy 13010, including eventual referral to the Committee on Conflicts of Interest and Commitment. Failure to meet primary departmental and university obligations will be handled through established university procedures appropriate to the situation (for example, formal reprimand, non-reappointment, post-tenure review, or dismissal for cause; see the Faculty Handbook for relevant appeal processes for such actions).

Nothing in this policy statement shall be interpreted as interfering with the academic freedom of faculty members, nor with their primary responsibility to direct their own research.

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